Chapter I:

INTRODUCTION
1.0. A Brief Introduction:

There has been substantial discussion and pondering over the aim of creation of arts. One group of philosophers and scholars propose that arts should not look beyond itself, it should give pleasure and should not address the issues except related to aesthetics. They call it 'art for art's sake'. The other group of intellectuals looks at arts as a means to address and solve the problems of people in particular and society in general. They believe in 'art for life's sake'. There have been arguments and counter arguments in defence and against of these propositions. It depends solely on the artist's personal perception of the world and about the men in the world as to which proposition he follows. In any civilized society and in every age, we see that there existed both the groups believing in 'art for art's sake' and 'art for life's sake'.

As Marxist say history of human evolution shows the division of society into two groups—haves and have nots, capitalists and labour, rich and poor, etc. Haves always enjoyed the privileges of making the policy and implementing it whereas have nots had always been kept away from the centers of power. This had led to the wide rift between these two groups. In every walk of life, the haves have an upper hand and literature is not an exception to it. Most of the writers either belongs to the upper-class or upper middle-class and naturally what they represent is concerned about themselves only—their search for an identity, their search for roots, their exile status, etc.

With the advent of new wave of liberalization, privatization and globalization, the socio-economic status of Indian middle class and upper middle-class has changed drastically. Most of these people live either in metropolitan cities or towns. Indian society have accepted new ways of living as regards their external appearance is concerned whereas they are reluctant to
accept western values like gender equality, scientific approach, etc. The open economic policy changed individual’s outlook towards life and it has great impact over people’s thinking and expression. The world had become a global village. People can exchange their ideas, values and feelings across the world. Marginalized factions in the society are vocalizing their rights and expressing their feelings more openly and confidently never before. The new ideas of liberalism and individualism are challenging the notions of India and Indian culture.

Theatre represents human life on the stage with its all facets and dimensions as well as colour and complexities. So, drama or theater has direct connection with human life. The great sage, Bharat Muni, in his great treatise Natyashashtra dictates: “Theatre is life. There is no art, no life, no craft, no learning, and no action which cannot be seen in it” (Ghosh, 25). The drama had been one of the finest expressions of Indian culture for the ages. The tradition of Indian English Drama has been enriched and augmented in post-independence epoch. Gradually, it begins to develop as powerful form for the creative expression. The marked difference between Pre- and Post-Independence drama is that most of the dramas were written in verse during pre-independence era, whereas the post colonial dramatists showed much inclination to prosaic drama. It registers the remarkable growth and also earns glory at national and international level in contemporary era. The playwrights find myths, legends, history, folklore etc. very useful and attractive for the thematic investment in their plays. In fact, contemporary playwrights reinvestigate this treasure of knowledge with present socio-culture and political scenario.

The present research work entitled ‘A Critical Study of Social Realism in the Selected Plays of Mahesh Dattani’ examines social realism reflected in the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani. Mahesh Dattani is an actor and director with his own theatre group and has an innate sense of dialogue that is vital, stimulating, lucid and effective. Dealing with compelling issues rooted in his
milieu, he has dispelled the perception about English theatre being just gratuitous fizz. With the coming of the Sahitya Akademi Award, Dattani is now considered an officially recognized part of the Indian literary establishment. He has been writing regularly for the stage and in 1993, he took to scriptwriting for cinema, television and radio as well. In the larger context of contemporary Indian theatre, it is difficult to situate him as a part of a continuum in a given ‘tradition’ of Indian playwriting, or even as a break, within the larger framework of Indian dramaturgy. Dattani himself would locate himself as the ‘change’ in that strand, evolving out of his roots without needing to unnecessarily hark back to the past, or drawing from a milieu that no longer sustains him or his audiences. The most important aspect of Dattani’s plays is that they address the ‘invisible issues’ of contemporary Indian society. For instance, the branching out of feminism into same-sex love relationship like homosexuality and lesbianism which are unacceptable to Indian society even today, find a place in Dattani’s plays. Gender relationship, and the plight of hijras (eunuchs), who are neither male nor female, but wanting to be both, are artistically as well as realistically presented in his plays.

The issues of homosexuality, the communal problem in India, sexual abuse of children and gender equality have contemporary resonance. These issues are affecting the contemporary familial and social life in India. Dattani’s plays question all kinds of discrimination including religious, sexual, and gender discrimination. They expose the violence of our private thoughts and the hypocrisy of our public morals. Women have been enslaved and subjugated right from the Vedic age. Besides women, homosexuals and hijras are marginalized in Indian society to whom equal rights have been denied. They want to be accepted as human beings on the equal grounds with the men and women. Few Indian writers writing in English have paid attention to the problems of the homosexuals and hijras. Hence the present research work undertakes the comprehensive study of Mahesh Dattani’s plays highlighting the
themes of sexuality, communal differences, sexual abuse of children and gender issues. The present research work is divided into four chapters.

The issues Dattani depicts are very much the issues in India. They are the realities of modern India, cosmopolitan India. Though some of the issues he speaks of are taboo issues they do exist in society; they are related to the lives of marginalized people. Gender discrimination and communal differences are very much same everywhere in India. People living in towns as well as villages; educated and uneducated follow the socially corrupt practices of gender discrimination and communal differences. The other issues like problems of eunuchs, homosexuality and sexual abuse of children are also a form of reality of many millions of lives in the country. The law of the land doesn’t permit the homosexual behaviour but it doesn’t prohibit the fact that many people live this kind of life though in secret. Children are abused sexually everywhere in the country and it’s also a very sensitive issue that people don’t want to talk about. Dattani by giving voice to all these marginalized voices in his plays has tried to put forth the condition of these people in the country. He is never didactic and his stand is not of a preacher. He just wants to sensitize the minds of the audience and make them aware about these issues in the country. People should realize that this is also our country; these are also problems in our country and such type of people also live a much neglected life in the country. We admit it or not these problems exist and as a citizen of the country one can’t turn a blind eye and say that these things are not part of reality in our country. Dattani deals with these issues as social realities that do exist at present in our country.

The following statements of investigation have been framed to explore the social realities in the form of issues or problems Mahesh Dattani addresses in his plays. The statements of investigations are:

- Do plays of Mahesh Dattani depict the social reality or the issues which affect society?
• Which are the issues that are socially relevant and handled by Mahesh Dattani?
• What are the exceptional facets of the writing of Mahesh Dattani which make him the writer of social realities?
• Are issues addressed by Mahesh Dattani ‘taboo issues’?
• Does Mahesh Dattani appeal audience to solve these problems in society?
• What are the ‘stage techniques’ used by Mahesh Dattani which make him the only Indian English playwright using such techniques?
• Does Mahesh Dattani provide any solutions to the problems through his plays?

1.1. Hypothesis:

It is hypothesized that contemporary Indian English Drama has a very extensive and deep convention of social issues which have been applied and implemented by few playwrights and Mahesh Dattani is a prominent name among them.

It is assumed that the plays of Mahesh Dattani address the ‘invisible issues’ in society. It is strongly believed that these plays deal with the issues of gender discrimination, communal differences, sexual abuse of children, plight of hijras and the homosexual behaviour. It is said that these issues are ‘taboo issues’.

It is considered that the issues handled by the playwright are rooted very much in the Indian soil; it is not fantasy but contemporary reality which we need to admit and about which we should be aware of.

1.2. Aims and Objectives:

Through the present literary research work the knowledge about the realism, social realism would be advanced in general and particularly about the treatment of social realistic issues handled by Mahesh Dattani in his plays. At large, the present research work will provide the perfect and comprehensive idea of social realism to the researchers, scholars and readers and enables them
to understand the growing importance and need of social realism in literature in contemporary and coming periods. The present research work will also surely be helpful for the readers to develop the critical insight about the treatment of social issues and its today’s existence and importance in literature. Following aims and objectives will be pursued:

- To study the various definitions of drama, the origin and development of English Drama, the origin and development of Indian English Drama.
- To explore and examine some facets of Mahesh Dattani’s writings and place him in the tradition of Indian English drama.
- To study and analyze the concepts like realism, romanticism, and social realism and its application in western literature and Indian English writing.
- To analyze Mahesh Dattani’s selected plays thoroughly with its prominent threads of social realism.
- To analyze the ‘invisible issues’ in the plays of Mahesh Dattani with its social and cultural background.
- To study the social status of marginalized sections (homosexuals, sexually abused children, eunuchs, and women) and their sufferings due to their marginalized status and their longings to be a part of mainstream society.
- To analyze the role of society on the behaviour of individuals and how the individuals are compelled to conform to the norms of the society.
- To point out and describe the implied message of every play.

1.3. Research Methodology:

It is an analytical research and is based on the analysis of social issues reflected in the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani. As and when required the descriptive method is also used to point out the impact of norms of social behaviour on the individuals. The proposed research work did not require any fieldwork and it is based on the analysis and above mentioned methods. The texts of selected plays, the reference books, journals, magazines, newspapers, interviews, updates from various sources and web material have been used as a
Primary Data and Secondary Data for the research. The MLA handbook (7th Edition) has been followed for references.

1.4. Review of Literature:

There are many entry points having different shades of meanings from which one can rightly enter in the world of Mahesh Dattani. He has presented the contemporary man and his life without romanticizing it. He has given the voice to these marginalized sections of society. His writing makes people think about these constituent parts of society. He has discussed, very sincerely, through his plays burning issues in the society. It is found that earlier many researchers and scholars have tried their level best to find out the relation between society and the individuals reflected in the plays of Mahesh Dattani. There is a book, ‘Form and Meaning in Mahesh Dattani’s plays’ by B.K. Das published in 2008. There is another book entitled ‘A Critical Study of Mahesh Dattani’s Plays’ by Pranav Joshipura published in 2009. Beena Agrawal has published a book ‘Mahesh Dattani’s Plays: A New Horizon in Indian Theater’ in 2008. Asha Kuthari Chaudhuri has written a book ‘Contemporary Indian Writers in English—Mahesh Dattani: An Introduction’ which was published in 2005. Parmar Bipin R. is another person who worked on ‘A Critical Study of Dramatic Works of Mahesh Dattani’ for the award of his Ph.D. in Saurashtra University, Gujrat in 2011. There is Alpna Saini who worked on ‘The Construction of Contemporary Indian Subjectivity in the Selected Plays of Vijay Tendulkar, Girish Karnad and Mahesh Dattani’ and got her Ph.D. from Punjabi University, Patiala in 2010. Another researcher G. Dharmaraja has got his Ph.D. on the topic ‘Gender and Family Relations in Mahesh Dattani’s Plays: A Study’. It rightly shows that the scope of research in this area has been increased greatly. Therefore, it would be an appropriate piece of research for the research scholars, academicians, and readers to perceive and understand social realism in general and its application in the selected plays of Mahesh Dattani in particular.
1.5. Drama: Meaning and Definition:

A literary art attains cosmic value when it reflects human experience and sensibility faithfully, and also corresponding with the universal socio-moral codes. By virtue of its live performance and potential to facilitate direct communication between the artist and the audience, drama has immersed as a potent literary mode of representation of human sensibility that is universal and is beyond the limitations of time and space. It is the oldest, authentic, and the most appealing form of literature. It has also been acknowledged as an instrument to human entertainment and enlightenment for ages. It has close affinity and affiliation with religion since time immemorial. The Indian tradition maintains that roots of all art are laying in the Pranav nada, Om. The dance of Lord Shiva is often said to be divine or cosmic play. Our great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata also attempt to define drama and dramaturgy. The Mahabharata defines drama as a mixture of poetry, story, action etc. The great ancient Indian poet and the creator of the Ramayana, Valmiki uses the word Nat or Narataka-meaning an actor or a performer.

The word ‘drama’ has its origin in Greek. It is originated from word dra meaning ‘do’. In this way, ‘doing’ or ‘action’ is column beam of the whole dramatic premise. Aristotle has also acknowledged action as the predominating component of drama. Narrative holds much importance in fiction, but action and dialogue hold paramount significance in drama. Compton- Rickett defines drama ‘as an articulate story presented in action.’ (Rickett, 89) This lays emphasis on speech and action in drama.

Drama is a representational art, a visible and audible narrative presenting virtual, fictional characters within a virtual, fictional universe. It has come close to the observation of Marjorie Boulton:

A true play is three dimensional. It is literature that walks and talks before our eyes. It is not intended that the eye shall perceive marks on paper and the imagination turn them into sights, sounds and actions; the text of the play is meant to be translated into sights, sounds and actions, which occur literally and
physically on the stage. Though in fact, plays are often read in silence, if we are to study drama at all intelligently we must always keep this in mind. (Boulton, 3)

It is appropriate to say that the composition of drama is more difficult task than other forms of literature. The playwright has to coordinate various elements like dialogue, music, plot, metaphoric construction, psyches of the characters and audience, paraphernalia and stage craft along with the unity of time. It is observed: “It is a composite art, in which the author, the actor and the stage manager all combine to produce the total effect.” (Worsfold, 73) The dramatist attempts to reach audience through the means of stage via performers. Performance, idea, and paraphernalia, make continuity to seek ‘wholeness’. The playwright is bound by economy of characterization and depiction of the events or episodes.

There are different kinds of drama. In a broader classification drama can be put into two categories: Tragic Drama (Tragedy) and Comic Drama (Comedy). From the structural point of view, both sub-genres of drama pass through five evolutionary phases known as pyramid structure of the drama. They are: Exposition, Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, and Catastrophe or denouement. Thus, the composition and functions of drama is quite compact than any other forms of literature. The success of drama involves the participation of the three variables: the playwright, performers and playgoers.

1.6. The Origin and Development of English Drama:

In England, the church played an important role in the nourishment and flourishing of the drama. It is very pertinent to say here that the drama appeared in England in the post-Norman conquest period. Before 10th century, there was no drama as such. It arrived in England with the Normans. An elementary form which may be called ‘Tableau’ existed outside England. The origin and development of miracle and morality play is also connected with this tradition. In those days, dramas were enacted in the church mainly based on

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religious and ethical subjects, written by the clergymen. In the course of time, it shifted from clergymen to common men ultimately reaching on to the streets.

The religious or sacred dramas were known as Miracle or Mystery Plays. These plays were based on the lives of saints or the Christ. The scenes were performed on the mobile stage which was known as pageants. *Ludus de Sancta Kathurian* was the earliest English Miracle play.

English drama attained artistic maturity during the Renaissance. The credit of writing first regular plays goes to Nicholas Udall, who wrote *Ralph Roister Doister* in 1541. It is the first regular comic play or comedy, whereas the credit of writing the first English tragedy goes to Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, who jointly composed English tragedy *Gorboduc* which was written some time during 1562. Hence, the regular English drama conceived under the classical influence even before the Elizabethan age in which drama attained the highest position among all the literary genres. It is to be noted here that there was a group of dramatists known as ‘University Wits’ namely Christopher Marlow, John Lyly, George Peele, Thomas Nash, Thomas Kyd, and Thomas Lodge. Thomas Kyd contributed significantly in the rapid development of English drama. His *Spanish Tragedy* was the significant Senecan tragedy that influenced a lot to many dramatists to apply melodramatic elements. Roman dramatist Seneca swayed greatly upon the tragic writers of England. His use of melodramatic elements in the plays tempted to imitate to the English writers. Needless to say, the English drama blossomed fully in the hands of Shakespeare, the uncrowned king of English literature.

1.7. The Origin and Development of Indian Drama:

Drama is the manifestation of religious instinct of human beings in most of the countries of the world, whether in India or Egypt, China or Britain. It is deeply rooted in religious instinct of the people. In ancient India, dramas were enacted in the temples. It was a kind of religious activity or offering to God on various occasions, events and celebrations. They were based mainly on religious scriptures, myths, legends etc. The good forces were praised and evil
forces were punished in them. Since these plays were staged in the temples, they were known as Temple plays.

As regards the birth of Indian drama, it dates back to pre-Christian era. The great sage and architect of Indian drama Bharat Muni appeared approximately in the seventh century A.D. He has very dexterously and interestingly propounded the theory of drama in his great work entitled *Natyashastra*, which is, perhaps, the first complete, concise, and a systematic treatise on drama in India. He said that gods wanted to have a thing of great entertainment with the combine qualities of audio-visual elements, which can be accessed for enjoyment equally to all segments of society. So, they prayed to Lord Brahma who has been regarded as the creator of the universe. Lord Brahma made drama opting nectar of all the four Vedas—the *Rigveda*, the *Sam Veda*, the *Yajurveda*, and the *Atharva Veda*. He took plot, music, acting and rasas (sentiments) from these four Vedas respectively. In this way, he created drama, the *fifth Veda*, which is characterized by the four different qualities of all the four Vedas. Thus, the inception or the birth of Indian classical Sanskrit drama traced back to the Vedic period. The journey of Indian drama commences with Sanskrit plays. It is observed:

> Indian tradition, preserved in the *Natyashastra*, the oldest of the texts of the theory of the drama, claims for the drama divine origin, and a close connection with the sacred Vedas themselves. (Keith, 12)

The drama had been one of the finest expressions of Indian culture for the ages. The inscriptions at the Sitabenga and Jogimara caves in south Bihar are good indicators of the existence of a well-developed dramatic tradition in India even in third century B.C.

However, it is to be noted here that the established notion of divine origin of Sanskrit drama is objected by some scholars by propounding unconventional hypotheses regarding the origin of drama—say for example Prof. R. V. Jagirdar of Karnataka college, Dharwar has traced its birth to the ‘Suta tradition of the Puranas’. (Deshpande, 15)
There are two broad divisions of all Sanskrit literature, *Drishya* and *Sravya*. The word ‘*Drishya*’ means something which can be seen or perceived with eyes. So, drama comes under this category. The word ‘*Sravya*’ means something which can be heard or listened to. The poetry in all forms comes under this category.

Technically speaking, Sanskrit play develops depending mainly on three constituents or elements. They are: (i) *Vastu* (plot) (ii) *Neta* (hero) and (iii) *Rasa* (sentiments). It should be mentioned here that while defining tragedy in his great work, *Poetics*, Aristotle also stresses much importance on plot. He considers the plot as the ‘soul of tragedy’. There can be tragedy without character but no one such without plot.

Kalidas, Asvaghosa, Bhavbhuti, Bhasha, Sudrak among others are the doyen dramatists in the whole range of history of Indian drama. They gave some immortal works of literature. They have been sources of inspiration not only for their successors but also continue to inspire the Indian playwrights even today.

Later on, unfortunately, Sanskrit drama became a court art or royal art as it ceased to be the literary exercise for the experts of Sanskrit. These Sanskrit *pandit* or scholars of Sanskrit had been obtaining due encouragement and incentives from the kings and the queens. The political changes also affected the development and continuity of Sanskrit drama.

In this way, India offered a fertile soil to the drama. It has a very splendid and richer tradition of dramatic literature than any other country or culture. Even before over 2000 years, it had its own systematic and elaborative dramatic theory.

1.8. Vernacular Form of Drama:

Basically, Indian drama nestled into the cradle of classical Sanskrit dramas. However, Indian drama can be classified into two groups (1) Sanskrit drama (2) Prakrit drama in vernacular language. After the decline of classical Sanskrit drama, Indian dramas registered substantial development in the
regional languages of India. Despite the foreign invasions and political changes, they persisted to exist as the potent tool of entertainment and enlightenment. Even today, people love to watch the regional dramas in almost all the states of India. Every folk theatre has its own identical name, for example, performance of the drama is called ‘Bhaona’ in Assam. In Bengal, it is known as ‘jatra’ which still persists and attracts the people of Bengal. The most interesting thing about jatra theatre is that it doesn’t require any fixed platform or stage properties. The word ‘jatra’ means a religious precession accompanied by dance, song, music etc. It is one of the earliest forms of drama in vernacular language. The vernacular form of drama is known as ‘Ramlila’ in northern India and ‘Kathakali’ in Kerala. Kathakali is the most representative of the life and mind of Keralite. Marathi stage, which centred on various rasas, has no much resemblance with other vernacular dramas in India.

‘Bhavai’ is the prakrit-vernacular form of folk tradition of Gujarati drama. It is one of the manifestations of Gujarati regional theatrical performance. It is the most popular folk theatrical tradition of Gujarat. The word ‘bhavai’ has wider connotation and variegated meaning. In dramatic world, bhavai means a kind of show or spectacle. The performers of bhavai are called bhavaiya.

1.9. Indian English Drama: Tradition and Achievement:

India has a prolonged, proud and splendid past of dramatic art. Perhaps, no country can withstand comparison with India in this matter except Greece. Actually, the tradition of Indian English Drama began with the arrival of the Britishers in India. Along with transcription of European models, Sanskrit plays were translated into English.

The development of Indian English Drama had been staggering for over nearly two centuries. It doesn’t mean that there were no writers. Right from the beginning of the twentieth century, the plays have been written and staged, but very few of them have met with thumping success on the stage. There were many dramatists who had tried their hands at writing plays. As a matter of fact,
most Indian English plays are translated works. Some of them by writers themselves, while some by others. A very few plays are originally written in English. The stunted journey of Indian English play is attributed to many factors. One of them is non-availability of stage-worthy plays. Writing and staging of the plays are two different tasks. In the same way, viewing of the play and reading of the play are quite two different experiences. Reading a play renders more information and less excitement, whereas viewing a play is the most exciting, appealing and memorable thing.

The drama requires great commitment and interest on either side – performers and viewers. Even the dramatist himself also depends on the players who perform his play. Drama, being an audio visual medium of expression, must be staged. And staging drama demands great care and conscious efforts not only on the part of performers but also on the part of viewers. In this connection, M. K. Naik aptly observes:

Drama is a composite art in which the written word of the playwright attains complete artistic realization only when it becomes the spoken word of the actor on the stage and through that medium reacts on the mind of the audience. A play, in order to communicate fully and become a living dramatic experience, thus needs a real theatre and a live audience. (Naik, 11-12)

Thus, the text of the play is meant for the stage – performance. When an English play is performed, we see Indian character speaking English in all kinds of situations and circumstances. This poses the problem of their liability before us. They speak English to the vendors, servants or their grandparents or elders. The dramatist must have convincing power for all these. There is a mixed reaction to the normal Indian speaking English with a milkman or a newspaper vendor. Again if they use Indian words or English words with Indian accent, there are some who will react against this also. So, there are some challenges before Indian dramatist for the creation of convincing Indian English theatre. It demands sincere and sustained efforts on the part of author and production authority to keep theatre going. Moreover, the lack of living
theatre in India is inhibiting factor for ongoing journey of Indian drama in English.

However, Indian English Drama is growing slowly and steadily for carving its niche in the realm of commonwealth literature. Since the pre-independence era, there have been constant efforts to create the plays with due dramatic qualities. Even after decades together, the attempts were not met with handsome results. The most Indian plays, available in English, are the translated works. We have but very few little original works in English. Drama, being composite art, it should be endowed with both qualities – literary and stage.

The origin of Indian drama in English can be traced back to the pre-independence era. Krishna Mohan Banerjee wrote the first Indian English play entitled The Persecuted or Dramatic Scenes Illustrative of the Present State of Hindoo Society in Calcutta. It appeared in 1831 on the literary horizon.

Thus, the journey of Indian English Drama embarked with the appearance of this play more than a century before the independence of the country. The play depicts clash and conflict of a sensitive Bengali youth that occurs due to traditionalism and liberal views resulting from the acquisition of foreign education. However, Indian English Drama has never achieved smart success.

It is very essential to mention here that the real journey of Indian Drama in English started with the publication of Michael Madhusudan Dutts translated play Is this called Civilization? The play came on the dramatic firmament of India in 1871. The play originally was written in Bengali and translated by the playwright himself into English. The play depicts the social life and the issues pertaining to that period. Ramkinoo Dutt wrote Manipura Tragedy in 1891. The dramas written during this era were not numerous in quantity. Moreover, they lacked in refinement and dramatic qualities.

However, under the influence of British Drama, Indian Drama in English beyond certain odds and obstacles began to blossom in the hands of
literary wizards like Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath Chatopadhyay, T. P. Kailasam and among others in pre-independence period.

Rabindranath Tagore and Sri Aurobindo are the connoisseurs of art and literature. They have been considered as the first Indian Playwrights of repute in Indian English Drama. They have contributed significantly in the field of Indian Drama in English. As regards Tagore's dramatic output, The Post office, Chitra, Sanyasi or The Ascetic, Sacrifice, The Cycle of Spring, The King and The Queen, Kacha and Devyani, The Mother's Prayer, Karna and Kunti, Somaka and Ritvika, Ama and Vinayaka, Autumn Festival, The Waterfall or Muktadhara, Red Oleanders, The King of the Dark Chamber among others are celebrated dramatic works credited to Tagore. All these works originally appeared in Bengali. Later on, they were translated into English. They are deeply rooted in Indian soil in terms of themes and ethos as well as Indian thoughts and philosophy. They bear the imprint of his literary genius. His plays hold much importance from the point of view of sustenance and enhancement of tradition of Indian Drama in English.

Sri Aurobindo, a man of versatile genius, has greatly enriched and enlightened Indian Drama in English by way of writing plays of good quality. He has, to his credit, five complete blank verse and six incomplete plays. He has made proper use of blank verse in his plays. He wrote his drama on the lines of Elizabethan drama. However, the influence of Sanskrit classical dramatists can also be felt in them.

But all five plays are steeped in poetry and romance, recalling the spirit and flavour of the distinctive dramatic type exemplified in different ways by Bhasa, Kalidas and Bhavabhuti, though, of course, all have Aurobindonian undertones. (Iyengar, 226)

Out of the five complete plays, only The Perseus the Deliverer appeared during the span of his life. The remaining four Vasavadutta, Rodogune, The viziers of Bassora and Eric were published posthumously. The Witch of IIni, Achab and Esarhaddon, The maid and the Mill, The Birth of Sin, The House of Brut, and The Prince of Edur are his incomplete works. These plays are diverse.
in themes and traditions. The Play *Rodogune* depicts the story of Cleopatra and disloyalty of her two sons Antiochus and Timocles. *The Perseus the Deliverer*, steeped in Greek myth of Perseus, dramatizes the conflict between old ethic and the new one emphasizing the prevalence of the new values. *Vasavadutta* is closely related to Sanskrit classical drama *Swapna Vasavadattam*, a comedy written by the great Indian dramatist Bhasa, whereas *The Viziers* and *Eric* are the plays rooted in alien background. It is very necessary to mention here that despite rich themes and verbal texture, the plays of these two literary wizards failed to impact on the stage.

Another great dramatic figure we encounter is Harindranath Chattopadhyay, who had made notable contribution in the realm of Indian English Drama. He had left behind him good dramatic legacy. He wrote seven plays in verse, which appeared under the title of *Poems and Plays* in the year 1927. He drew the material from the lives of the great Indian saints for all the seven plays. These plays are also known as hagiological plays. He began his dramatic voyage with *Abu Hassan* in 1918. He has to his credit prose plays, which arrived on literary scene under the title *Five Plays* (1929). They are deeply dyed with the colour of socialist views and realism. The play *The Window and the Parrots* depicts the lives of the poor people. *Sidharth: Man of Peace* deals with the glory of Buddha's life. The play *The Sentry's Lantern* displays the writer's deep concern for the unreached and unaccessed. It symbolizes the ensuing hope and aspiration for the unprivileged and unreached. It is to be noted here that his plays lacked the dramatic qualities. Hence, they failed to impact the audience. However, the subject matters of the plays are very rich and dignified. They are remarkable for the philosophical flavour.

The dramatic geniuses of these three outstanding Bengali playwrights- Sri Aurobindo, Tagore and Chattopadhyaya find due expression in their great works. All these three literary stalwarts have made substantial help for establishing and enhancing the tradition of Indian English drama and adding new dimension to it.
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A. S. P. Ayyar is another great playwright in the realm of Indian drama in English. With his six dramas, he has made significant contribution to the field of Indian drama in English. *The Clutch of Devil* (1929) is his first drama and *The Trial of Science for the Murder of Humanity* is the last one. What holds prime significance in his plays is the message, while plot and characterization are of the subsidiary significance. He employs drama as the mode for seizing reality of contemporary life. Briefly, his dramatic output helped to continue the journey of Indian Drama in English.

The next great dramatic figure we come across is T. P. Kailasam who wrote both in English and Kannad. It should be noted here that T. P. Kailasam has been considered as the father of modern Kannad drama. However, his dramatic art blossoms fully in English drama. G. S. Amur appreciates his creative caliber in the following terms:

A talented actor who appeared in the amateur as well as the professional stage, he brought to the writing of drama an intimate knowledge of theatre. It is for this reason that his plays whether in Kannad or English have a uniform technical excellence. (Amur, 186)

T. P. Kailasam has ardent love for dramatic genre. He has to his credit *The Burden* (1933), *Fulfillment* (1933), *The purpose* (1944), *Karna* (1946) and *Keechaka* (1949).

In the beginning, there was no woman dramatist worth considering in the realm of Indian English Drama. However, after many decades of its journey, Bharati Sarabhai appeared on the literary scene of Indian drama in English. She is the first female dramatist of pre-independence era. She wrote two plays – *The Well of the People* (1943) and *Two Women* (1952). These plays could meet with good success. The most important thing is that her play *The Well of the People* deals with Gandhian idealism. By that way, it attaches Gandhian flavour to Indian drama in English.

The last great dramatic voice in pre-independence era is J.M. Lobo Prabhu, who has been credited with about a dozen plays. Among them, only two plays – *Mother of New India: A Play of the Indian Village in Three Acts* A Ph.D. Thesis, S. R. T. M. University, Nanded (MS)
(1944) and *Death Abdicates* (1945) were published during pre-independence era. The rest of the plays were published under the title *Collected Plays* in 1956. Technically speaking, Lobo Prabhu excels in creating live dialogues and situations, but his art of characterization is not so powerful and convincing.

Besides above cited dramatists of pre-independence era, there were some other dramatists who also attempted to plough the field of this literary genre, but they couldn’t make notable contribution in the field of Indian drama in English. They were: A.C. Krishnaswami (*Two Twice Born* -1914), S.M. Michel (*Nation Builders*), V.V.S. Iyengar (*Dramatic Divertissements*, a collection of six humourous playlets-1921), Sudhindra Nath Ghose (*Colours of a Great City*), Niranjan Pal (*The Goddess* -1924), R.K. Narayan (*The Watchman of the Lake*), Balwant Gargi (*The Vulture and Other Plays*-1941, *Barrister at Law* -1977), Mimalini Sarabhai (*Captive Soul*-1945), Nalini Mohan Chatterjee (*Krishna* -1937), S.C. Bhatt (*Trial Celestial* -1940), K.R. Srinivas Iyengar (*Sumti and Her Spouse*, *The Storm in a Tea Cup*, *Battle of the Optional* – 1930), A.S. Raman (*Charity Hospital* -1944), S. Fyzee Rahamen (*Daughter of Ind* -1940), Purushottam Tricumdas (*Sauce for the Goose*-1946), S.D. Ghosal (*Princess Kalyani*-1930), V. Narayanan (*Where God is Not and other Playlets*-1933), D.M. Borgaonkar (*Image Breakers*) among others.

**1.10. Indian English Drama in the Post-Independence Era:**

The tradition of Indian English Drama has been enriched and augmented further in post-independence epoch. Gradually, it begins to develop as powerful form for the creative expression. The marked difference between pre- and post-independence drama is that most of the dramas were written in verse during pre-independence era, whereas the post colonial dramatists showed much inclination to prosaic drama. All the same, the poetic drama continues to exist in the post colonial period. It is attributed:

... Tagore – Aurobindo – Kailasam tradition of poetic drama continues, but with a difference in the hands of Manjeri Isvaran, G.V. Desani, Lakhan Deb and Pritish Nandy. (Naik, 256)
Despite the immense popularity of film and T.V. serials, English plays were produced on the stage at home and abroad very successfully impacting the audience in an unprecedented manner. G.V. Desani's best known play *Hali* (1950) was performed and won rave review. It was successfully staged in India and also at the Watergate Theatre in London in 1950. It depicts the theme of love and passion. Prof. Iyengar observes:

A short poetic play, *Hali* is an attempt to project the story of a 'passion': in other words, Hali's confrontation of the powers of creation and destruction, his grapple with life and death, his surrender to the play of this phenomenal world, his communication with love, and his transcendence of the dualities of time and place. (Iyengar, 243)

Lakhan Deb and Gurucharan Das are another two playwrights of some distinction. Their plays were performed on the stage in and out of India and got considerable success. Lakhan Deb composed three dramas, *Tiger's Claw* (1967), *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* (1976) and *Vivekanand* (1972). These plays are written in verse and they deal with historical events. The play *Tiger's Claw* deals with the murder of Bijapur General Afzal Khan by Shivaji, whereas *Murder at the Prayer Meeting* deals with assassination of the father of nation, Mahatma Gandhi. This play reminds us the famous play *Murder in the Cathedral* by T.S. Eliot. He has made ample use of dramatic devices especially chorus and prologue in his plays. His plays are marked with the flawless quality of verse. Gurucharan Das also contributed his humble mite to the development of Indian English Drama. His play *Larins Sahib* is the fine example of decolonization of English language in the post-independence era. His play *Mira* was staged as a ballet in New York and in Bombay very successfully.

Pratap Sharma is another dramatic voice who has contributed considerably in the field of Indian English Drama. He has produced two stage-worthy plays. They are *A Touch of Brightness* (1968), and *The Professor Has a War Cry* (1970). It should be noted here that his plays were great success on
stage in abroad, but they could not be performed in India. Sex is the underlying theme of his plays. However, Pratap Sharma ‘displays a keen sense of situation and his dialogues are often effective.’ (Naik, 261)

Nissim Ezekiel, a well known poet, also wrote five plays. However, the fact remains that he is not as much ease with dramatic art as with poetic art. His Three Plays (1969) consisting Nalini, a comedy in three acts, Marriage Poem, a tragic-comedy and The Sleep Walkers, an Indo- American farce, are the good commentary on the vanity and futility of urban middle class. He has employed ironical fantasy, satire, etc. to exhibit hollowness of urban middle class.

Asif Currimbhoy has emerged as the most prominent and prolific playwright in the post-independence era. He has rendered substantial contribution to Indian English Drama by publishing more than thirty plays with an eye on stage. His best known plays are: The Tourist Mecca (1959), The Doldrummers (1962), Thorns on a Canvas (1962), The Restaurant (1960), The Dumb Dancer (1961), The Captives (1963), Goa (1964), The Hungry Ones (1965), Monsoon (1965), An Experiments with Truth (1969), Inquilab (1970), The Refugee (1971), Sonar Bangla (1972), The Miracle seed (1973) and The Dissident MLA (1974) among others.

Asif Currimbhoy touches up diverse issues and events in his plays such as social, political, economical, philosophical, historical, psychological, religious, cross-cultural, etc. His theatrical art, efficiency and profound knowledge of various human fields has immensely enriched and expanded the tradition of Indian English Drama. He has rightly been considered as “India’s first authentic voice in the theatre” (Bowers, XII)

Gradually, Indian English Drama begins to strengthen its position and started carving its own identity and place in Indian Writing in English. It registers the remarkable growth and also earns glory at national and international level in contemporary era. With the thematic and theatrical innovations, Indian English Drama marks the beginning of distinctive tradition in the realm of world drama. The playwrights find myths, legends, history,
folklore etc. very useful and attractive for the thematic investment in their plays. In fact, contemporary playwrights reinvestigate this treasure of knowledge with present socio-culture and political scenario. However, it should be pinpointed here that contemporary drama mainly depends on translation. The plays, written in vernacular languages, are translated into English. So, the translation works boosted up the Indian dramatic scene. In this context, the contributions of some great playwrights like Girish Karnad, Mohan Rakesh, Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar are highly wonderful and therefore, occasions here special elucidation.

Girish Karnad is one of the outstanding playwrights in the modern India. He has considerably enriched and enlightened the tradition of Indian English Drama. During his childhood days in countryside of Karnataka, he encountered with some Natak Mandalis which made indelible impression on his sensitive mind and subsequently found expressions in his dramatic works. Karnad has composed eight plays. All these plays are originally appeared in Kannad and later on, have been translated into English. He began his dramatic career with the publication of his maiden play *Yayati* in 1961. He is retelling the myth of the *Mahabharata* very skillfully in this play. He works out the motivation that facilitates Yayati's final choice. It is a very unique and original play. Of the eight plays, five plays, *Tughlaq, Hayavadana, Naga-Madala, Tale-Danda* and *The Fire and the Rain* are reincarnated into English. It is very essential to mention here that *Tughlaq* is also converted into some foreign languages especially Hungarian and German.

Girish Karnad has been awarded Bharatiya Natya Sangha Award for his *Hayavadana*. However, it is his next play *Tughlaq* which earns him name and fame as a major dramatist. He has also received the most prestigious Jnanpith Award for his wonderful contribution in the field of Indian English Drama. Karnad's plays were staged successfully and got international recognition. He is capable of comprehending requisites of stage production of the play. He is adept at converting any event or any situation into aesthetic experience. Girish
Kamad delves deep into myths and legends of India and employs them as vehicle of a new vision and interpretation. He gives fine and fresh food to apologetic existence of Indian English Drama.

The next great dramatic voice in contemporary era that needs to be discussed is that of Vijay Tendulkar who provides new force and direction to Marathi theatre as well as Indian English theatre. Tendulkar, prolific dramatist of Marathi, begins his career as a freelance writer and emerges as prominent playwright on the literary scene of India. His dramatic corpus is vast, varied and wonderful. He has written twenty eight full length plays and twenty one act plays. He has also authored some children’s dramas and a novel. He has, originally, written all his plays in Marathi. Most of his plays are translated into English. Some of his well-known plays are, *Silence! The Court is in Session*, (1968), *Ghashiram Kotwal* (1972), *Kanyadan* (1982), *Sakhram Binder* (1972), *The Vultures, Kamala* (1982), etc. Considering his great service to Indian theatre, he has been honoured by Natak Akademi in 1971.

Another brilliant star in the literary firmament of India is Badal Sircar who externalizes the existential attitude of modern life through his dramatic works. He has to his credit, *Solution X, Evam Inderjit* (1962), *That Other History* (1964), *There is not End* (1971), *Pagla Ghoda, Palap, Pary Konodin, Jadi Aur Ek Baar, Stale News, Procession*.

Badal Sircar is called ‘barefoot playwright’. Since theatre is the effective and powerful medium of sharing our views and opinions with the people, Sircar employs theatre as a mode of social change and expresses his views and ideas pertaining to socio-economic issues. What makes him endearing dramatist is his successful attempt to relate theatre to people and develops it to suitable people’s theatre which is assisted and developed by people. He aims at delineating ground reality of Indian villages.

He has not only broken the dictionary between the actors and audience but reduced the drama to its barest by dispensing with conventional story, plot, characters and dialogue. (Reddy, 110)
Sircar involves new technique of live communication with play-goers who also actually participate in performance of the play especially concerning contemporary social issues. He evolves ‘third theatre’ deriving the good qualities of both the first and second theatre of Calcutta. Sircar, an avant-garde dramatist, has touched diverse themes in his plays such as social, political, exploitation, etc. He started his theatrical career with comic plays like Solution X. His Evam Inderjit has been hailed as a milestone in the modern dramatic world, whereas his play Stale News centers on the concept of Third Theatre. It should be noted here that his concept of Third Theatre was considerably influenced by Grotowski’s ‘Poor Theatre’.

Badal Sircar is one of the prominent playwrights of modern India who has revolutionized the conventional concept of theatre and freed theatre from the saddle of droning stuff. Sircar’s ‘Third Theatre’ facilitates the process of ‘being within and experiencing’ with the persona and the event being performed on the stage. His theatre differs from other theatre by bringing actors and the spectators on the same wavelength mentally and physically as well.

Another doyen dramatist in the arena of contemporary drama is Mohan Rakesh who is best known for his play Halfway House which is a translated work of his Hindi play ‘Adhe Adhure’. The play depicts discord and dichotomy of family life. It also explains how parental discord affects on the lives of the children. One Day in Ashadha (1958) and The Great Swans of the Waves (1902) are also his full length plays dealing with the historical past. Nonetheless, the theme of man-woman relationship is also well explored in these plays. Since drama is the most powerful and potent means to explore human experience, Mohan Rakesh has used it for exploring man-woman relationship in a very realistic way. As far as Mohan Rakesh’s dramatic output is concerned, it is not very large one but his contribution to the field of Indian Drama is myriad.

In the present era, the genre of drama has also attracted women dramatists to try their hands in the field of the theatrical art. Among the women
dramatists, Manjula Padmanabhan is the great dramatic figure that demands special attention. The other women playwrights who have also contributed to the development of tradition of Indian English Drama in contemporary era are those of Dina Mehta, P. Sengupta, Mahasweta Devi, Uma Parameswaran and others.

Mahasweta Devi, prolific female playwright, deserves special mention. She has authored a good number of novels and articles. Her writing credentials crosses publication of more than 200 books. She originally wrote in Bengali, but her works have been translated into the major languages of India and also of the major languages of the world like English, French etc. Her contribution to Indian English Drama is, indeed, great and commendable. In her writings, she delves deep on the problems and issues of the unreached and unjust masses of our society. She registered her protest against the violation of basic human rights to the unprivileged section of the society like women, dalit, children, etc.

Mahasweta Devi is the writer with the commitment. Her writings display her social commitment and concern. Mahasweta Devi shows angry look at the societal unjust and inhuman treatment to the underdogs without any rhyme and reason in our hierarchical social construction and structure. Since the drama is the most powerful means to bring change in society, she presents through it the heart rendering problems and constraints of the marginalized Indian masses which, in fact, constitute a large section of our society. In her play Water, she dramatizes the grave problems like gender and caste discrimination, exploitation and violation of basic human rights to lower caste people. Water is the basic need for human existence on earth. The play Water captures the realistic picture of denial of water to the downtrodden and tribal in the countryside of West Bengal.

Uma Parmeswaran is also another great name in the field of Indian English Drama. She has made a notable contribution to Indian English Drama. She begins her career as a newspaper reporter and today she is considered as a noted poet, short story writer and dramatist. Presently, she has been working as
a professor of English with Winnipeg University. She also serves as a regional representative, National Council of the Writers’ Union of Canada. She has made sustained and sincere efforts for presenting glorious heritage and culture of India on the global stage. Committed to the task, she has formed a center called Performing Arts & Literatures of India (PALI). She has to her credit plays like Sons Must Die, Meera (1971), Sita’s Promise, Rootless but Green are the Boulevard Trees (1998), Dear Did (1989), My Sister (1989).

Manjula Padmanabhan is a playwright of high dramatic caliber. She is one of the most powerful female playwrights of contemporary era. She has received the most prestigious Onassis award for her pioneering play Harvest. The problems of alienation and marginalization are the oft repeated themes in her plays. She depicts a very dirty decaying world in which mothers are seen bargaining their kids for the ‘price of rice’. The play Harvest, which puts its playwright on international stage, is a gruesome tale of despondent and dilapidated family living in a chawl of metropolitan, Mumbai. Forced by the ill and adverse circumstances, a twenty year young lad namely Om Prakash decides to be an organ donor. Eventually, he is compelled to bargain his own body to a white ‘First World buyer’. This incident reminds us the scene in which Dr. Faustus bargains his soul to Mephistopheles, chieftain of evil power.

Manjula Padmanabhan is the distinguished and doyen woman playwright in the field of Indian Drama in English. She is the playwright of competent art and craft. Besides Indian English Drama, her contribution in the field of art and fiction is highly commendable. It is attributed:

Very recently Indian English Drama shot into prominence. Younger writers like Mahesh Dattani and Manjula Padmanabhan have infused new life into this branch of writing. (Dhawan, 19)

Prior to the above discussed women dramatists, there are some other women dramatists like Usha Ganguly, P. Sengupta among others who have also used theatrical art to depict feminine self and psyche, their anguish and agony. In post-independence era, the women writers have started to register their
protest against the domestic violence, suppression and subjugation of women as a second rank citizen, physical and mental exploitation of women through theatrical art. Hence, one can call it ‘Theater of Protest’. The women dramatists have immense theatrical potentiality to delineate feminine self, psyche and sensibility as well as plight of women in patriarchal social setup. The female playwrights document the realistic scenes of social-economic and psychocultural condition of women in our society.

1.11. Mahesh Dattani: Life and Works:

Mahesh Dattani is an actor and director with his own theatre group and has an innate sense of dialogue that is vital, stimulating, lucid and effective. Dealing with compelling issues rooted in his milieu, he has dispelled the perception about English theatre being just gratuitous fizz. His audiences have been large and responsive, both to the spectacle and the language.

...people have to come to terms with the fact that English is an Indian language!...India has this enormous capacity to absorb from all sources. ...The sooner we come to terms with that, we can get on with the rest (Vardhan, Web).

With decades of English education in India, both in schools and in universities, the country is home to the largest English-knowing population in the world. Thus, there is a very large potential audience for plays in English and not merely through translations. All of this, however, does not make for a substantial body of work in English theatre in India, standing as it does, in the shadow of plays in the vernacular. But steadily the picture seems to be changing, as a distinct and definite theatrical identity and idiom evolves. Says Dattani:

It’s hard work...Not many people have that kind of time. Theatre companies have to trust new playwrights and their plays, too. ...I’m an actor, I’m a director, so I know the craft of writing a play. The craftsmanship has to be worked at...(Dasgupta, Web)

With the coming of the Sahitya Akademi Award, Dattani is now considered an officially recognized part of the Indian literary establishment.
Countering the usual criticism that his work is hardly ‘Indian’ because of his medium and his use of the proscenium stage, Erin Mee quotes Dattani:

Does (Indian theatre) mean traditional theatrical forms? Yes, they’re wonderful, they’re very sophisticated, they’re impressive, but are they really India?...What we need to do now is look at those forms and say we’re approaching the twenty first century, this is who we are and this is our legacy, so where do we take that. That’s not happening, and that’s a matter of serious concern. (Mee, 24-25)

Mahesh Dattani was born on 7 August 1958 in Bangalore where his parents had moved to from Gujarat. Studying at Baldwins, Dattani recalls his experiences at this Christian institution, morning assembly in the ‘chapel’ and singing hymns. The medium of communication was strictly English and speaking in the vernacular in school was frowned upon.

Unpleasant distinctions were made between the ‘vernies’ and the ones who were fluent in English. Snob values were inculcated early on and you generally were made to feel privileged to belong to that school. We were taught English literature with a capital E! (Ayyar, Web)

The family – his parents and two elder sisters would attend Gujarati plays that were often performed at Bangalore, by way of keeping in touch with their roots, and the young Dattani was struck by the aura of the stage and the illusory world of the theatre that would stay with him. Later, watching Gujarati and Kannada plays in his late teens he realized:

I didn’t know the world at my doorstep. I got involved in theatre and for a long time continued to do European plays in translation. (...Seeing) Gujarati theatre in Mumbai, I realized I had to unlearn a lot that I learn in school. That is when my true education really began. (Ayyar, Web)

Dattani was involved in the Theatre during his school and college days. And later on, he acted in plays and then directed plays and started his theatre company. At the initial stage of his involvement in the translation and direction of plays, he had not planned to become a playwright. It was under the influence
of Vijay Tendulkar and later on, Tennessee Williams, he began writing plays. He makes this clear in course of an interview with Sachidananda Mohanty in the following passage:

Well, I was particularly impressed by the plays of Vijay Tendulkar. Actually, that was one of the reasons why I decided to write myself, because when I saw plays in Hindi or Gujarati and I managed to acquire the translation, they just didn’t have the same impact. *Silence, the Court is in Session!* was such a brilliant play, but I felt that the translation in English threw away most of the effect. Later on, it was Tennessee Williams. I relate to Tennessee Williams because he writes about vulnerable women in a very violent society. I think I tend to do that as well, although I don’t see my woman as vulnerable, in the sense that they do fight their battles. They are not on the winning side of the battle, and I think I have learnt a lot about dramatic structure. (Mohanty, 173)

At St Joesph’s College Dattani was neither a student of literature (graduating in History, Economics and Political Science, acquiring a masters in Marketing and Advertising Management), nor did he show any signs of a literary imagination, expecting to spend a ‘normal’ life, helping run his father’s business. Still in college in the early 1980s, Dattani joined Bangalore Little Theatre and participated in workshops, acting and directing plays. He underwent western ballet training under Molly Andre at Alliance Francaise de Bangalore (1984-87) and Bharatanatyam training under Chandrabhaga Devi and Krishna Rao, Bangalore (1986-90).

In 1984, he founded Playpen, his own theatre company and began to look for Indian plays in English, not the usual western canonical texts that were generally performed. He was already confronting the essential problem. Dattani speaks of his choice of English as his medium as one that is home grown and Indian – a ‘hybrid language’ that is spoken normally and unobtrusively, in an uninhibited way, as a matter of course by his characters who are essentially Indian. “…you’ve got to be true to your expression also. English is for me a
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sort of given. It’s my language as it is to a lot of Indians here and abroad”
(Menon and Prakash, Web)

Like many urban people in India, you’re in this situation where the language you speak at home is not the language of your environment, especially if you move from your hometown. And you use English to communicate, so you find that you’re more and more comfortable expressing yourself in English (...but) I wanted to do more Indian plays (and that) became a challenge, because there weren’t many good translations – or, there may have been good translations, but they didn’t do anything for me. (Mee, 14)

Dattani solved the problem by writing his own play, *Where There’s a Will* in 1988 that was performed at the Deccan Hearld Theatre Festival. And the playwright came into being.

Though Dattani was impressed by Marathi theatre and less enthusiastic about Gujarati theatre, he chose to write his plays in English. He makes his stand clear on the question of the language in which he writes in an interview given to Ranu Uniyal in the following passage:

My mother tongue is Gujarati. My Mom doesn’t know English and even with my Dad I conversed in Gujarati (my father passed away in 2000) and it’s only amongst the siblings, my two sisters and I, that we speak in English because all three of us received education where the first language, that is, the medium of instruction was English, and of course, we were encouraged to speak in English at a very young age because that was seen as the language of the future...Writing plays really happened more out of necessity because I wanted to do more Indian plays in English. But the translations that were available didn’t do justice to the original. So I thought why not try my hand in writing the plays myself and it’s quite ironic that what I began to do out of necessity became a passion. Later I had my theatre company in Bangalore and at the moment a studio theatre just two streets from where I live devoted entirely to new writing in English. And I do workshops for playwrights and actors and directors as well and I see it as a laboratory
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for new works, interesting new works. (Uniyal, 176-177)

He has been writing regularly for the stage from then on, and in 1993, he took to scriptwriting for cinema, television and radio as well. All his plays are first tried out with Playpen, where he puts the concluding touches on his dialogue in rehearsal, using the input from his actors. His workplace, Mahesh’s studio as he calls it houses a mini amphitheatre with three rows of semi-circular seating, spotlights, and high mud walls covered with bougainvillea and jasmine. It is here that he writes his plays using a computer, working on the performance dynamics, staging a small production, conducting a theatre workshop or even hosting an art exhibition.

My milieu is theatre. You can’t operate in isolation,...! I do want a theatre movement to happen. The major block for that is lack of sound training and professionalism. We have the talent, but theatre is more than that: it’s a craft of communicating through the language of action. (Dasgupta, Web)

Teaching and conducting workshops both at home and abroad to supplement his income, Dattani acknowledges that it is difficult to survive on playwriting alone. Meanwhile, his plays are being staged, published, and translated in India and abroad. The range of his themes, his mandatory split level stage, and his own internalization of craft by way of the fact that stage worthiness is never compromised upon, have all contributed to the continued growth and renewal of his art both in terms of form and content. He deals with sexuality and gender issues, religious tension, and the workings of personal and moral choices as he explores a gamut of human relationships. From Where There’s a Will, to the matrix of gender roles in Dance Like a Man and Tara, to Bravely Fought the Queen that explores the shams of the upper middle class joint family, to Final Solutions, a gripping and sensitive play about the Hindu-Muslim conflict, to Do the Needful, originally a radio play that comically talks about alternate sexual choices as do On a Muggy Night in Mumbai and Seven Steps Around the Fire, to Thirty Days in September which looks at incest and
child abuse, Dattani has never fallen short of serious issues that need to be addressed.

How then does the Indian audience connect? Given his chosen medium of expression, the language of his plays obviously restricts a wider, more expansive, grassroots audience in India. That is not exactly the kind of audience that he is looking for, in any case, as he claims that he writes for the urban Indian upper and middle class audience and not for the working class audience:

The more your basic needs are taken care of, the more space you have to reflect on certain things. Whereas, if you don’t have that space and are concerned 24 hours about your basic needs, then you want to escape into something else… (Vardhan, Web)

Given the same criteria, however, Dattani has successfully managed to garner a very supportive audience worldwide, amongst the Indian diasporas, or even among the marginalized fringe audiences who seem to find a voice through his plays. The BBC Radio frequently commissions Dattani’s plays, and he was one of the two Indians asked to contribute for the celebrations on Chaucer’s six-hundredth anniversary. The reception problems here are entirely different. For instance, an Indian audience would instantly connect a play like, *Seven Steps Around the Fire* to marriage – but what about the foreign ones?

I try and explain the context within the story line without spelling it out. There are other cultural references like ‘Avaraikkai Sambhar’. …But they also need to make the effort. If we can learn and look up French and English words thrown at us. They should also look it up. (Santhanam, Web)

This in some sense does locate the playwright Dattani firmly on Indian soil. He would therefore write an altogether ‘Indian’ text like *Tale of a Mother Feeding her Child* to commemorate Chaucer’s six-hundredth anniversary, mounted on that quintessentially British Chaucerian framework of *The Canterbury Tales*. Says Michael Walling, the artistic director of the multi-

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A Ph.D. Thesis, S. R. T. M. University, Nanded (MS)
cultural theatre company Border Crossings in his introductory note to *Bravely Fought the Queen*:

His plays fuse the physical and spacial awareness of the Indian theatre with the textual rigour of western models like Ibsen and Tennessee Williams. It’s a potent combination, which shocks and disturbs through its accuracy, and its ability to approach a subject from multiple perspectives. Post-colonial India and multicultural Britain both have an urgent need for a cultural expression of the contemporary; they require public spaces in which the mingling of eastern and western influences can take place. Through his fusion of forms and influences, Mahesh creates such a space. This is in itself a political and social statement of astonishing force. (Walling, 229)

In the larger context of contemporary Indian theatre, it is difficult to situate him as a part of a continuum in a given ‘tradition’ of Indian playwriting, or even as a break, within the larger framework of Indian dramaturgy. Dattani himself would locate himself as the ‘change’ in that strand, evolving out of his roots without needing to unnecessarily hark back to the past, or drawing from a milieu that no longer sustains him or his audiences:

... I do see myself as the change element of that thread. I’m not so sure even that I want to go back to my roots...I don’t need to revisit it. I’m more interested in pushing it forward. ..I am pushing, and I’m pushing the audience. (Vardhan, Web)

Well known theatre personalities, such as directors, producers and actors have written introduction to Dattani’s plays included in the two volumes published by Penguin Books in 2000 and 2005. These include the names of Lillette Dubey, Jeremy Mortimer, Mithran Devanesen, Sanjeev Shah, Shabana Azmi, Sally Avens, John McRae, Erin Mee, Sita Raina, Alyque Padamsee and Michael Walling. Let us take some of the significant statements made by these important personalities on the dramatic art of Dattani:

As I suggested in the introduction to *Final Solutions and Other Plays* (1994), his special theatrical quality to build tension in a social context, leading to a classic dramatic confrontation which involves not only the
characters themselves, but which also confronts the audiences with its expectations and attitudes. (McRae, 46)

Mahesh's plays often feature characters who are questioning their identity, and who feel isolated in some way. (Mortimer, 4)

Mahesh Dattani frequently takes as his subject the complicated dynamics of the modern urban family. His characters struggle for some kind of freedom and happiness under the weight of tradition, cultural constructions of gender, and repressed desire. His dramas are played out on multi-level sets where interior and exterior become one, and geographical locations are collapsed—in short, his settings are as fragmented as the families who inhabit them. In his plays, Dattani takes on what he called the 'invisible issues' of Indian society. (Mee, 320)

It will be helpful if we take Dattani's own views on his plays and how he became a playwright, along with the comments by critics stated above. In course of an interview Dattani states:

'You can talk about feminism, because in a way that is accepted. But you can't talk about gay issues because that's not Indian, [that] doesn't happen here. You can't talk about a middle-class housewife fantasizing about having sex with the cook or actually having a sex life—that isn't Indian either—that's confrontational even if it is Indian'. By pulling taboo subjects out from under the rug and placing them on stage for public discussion, Dattani challenges the constructions of 'India' and 'Indian' as they have traditionally been defined in modern theatre. He encourages other playwrights to do the same: 'Our culture is so rich with tradition, and that's a great advantage and a great disadvantage as well, because...we're living in the present and there are so many challenges facing us—you just have to cross the road and you have an issue,...I think it is very important for our country to spawn new playwrights...who reflect honestly and purely our lives, because...that is our contribution to the world.' (Mee, 319)
Speaking of the need for poetic licence in a play, Dattani underlines the following:

Should the play be read in classrooms, I sincerely wish that English language teachers and staunch Wren and Martinites will not dismiss my syntax as bad English, or worse still, as incorrect. While knowledge of the rules of grammar is important, the richness and variety of the spoken word is a study in itself. (Ramaswamy, 278-79)

Mahesh Dattani acknowledges his indebtedness to two directors, Alyque Padamsee and Lillete Dubey who helped him to build his self-esteem and confidence by their production of his plays. Alyque’s comments, ‘At last a playwright with some conviction’ encouraged Dattani to write more plays. Dattani says, ‘Alyque believed in my work even before I believed in it myself. He gave me the courage to call myself a professional playwright and director’ (Preface to Collected Plays, XII). And about Lillette, Dattani says,

Many years later, after Alyque had produced successful productions of *Tara* and *Final Solutions*, Lillette chose to do *Dance Like a Man*. At that point I don’t think anyone knew that the play will create some sort of a record doing more than a hundred shows in India, London, Dubai and Colombo, and God knows where else Lillette wants to take it. Unheard of for a silly Indian play in English about retired Bharatanatyam dancers to meet with such success. I think a large part of its success goes to Lillette’s vividly limned portrayal of Ratna, a woman confronting the demons created by her past and present actions...Lillette pulled off the impossible task of making a commercial success of *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, a play about the travails of gay men and women, some of them strongly anti-heterosexual. Never in any wildest imagination did I expect this play to play to mainstage audiences. It did, thanks to Lillette’s perseverance and true grit. (Dattani, XIV)

From the observations of the directors and theatre personalities and from Dattani’s acknowledgements, certain important points about him and his plays emerge.
The most important aspect of Dattani’s plays is that they address the ‘invisible issues’ of contemporary Indian society. For instance, the branching out of feminism into same-sex love relationship like homosexuality and lesbianism which are unacceptable to Indian society even today, find a place in Dattani’s plays. Gender relationship, and the plight of hijras (eunuchs), who are neither male nor female, but wanting to be both, are artistically as well as realistically presented in his plays.

The second important aspect of Dattani’s plays is that they dive deep into human heart and create characters true to life situations. To watch his plays being enacted on the stage is to see the characters inside out. These characters seek an identity for themselves which is both lovable and enduring. Engrossed in contemporary reality, his characters seek a remedy of their ills and sufferings caused by poverty and societal discrimination.

The third important characteristic of his plays is the family bond that binds its members together or the breaking of that bond through mutual distrust and suspicion. Extra-marital relationship is a favourite subject with Dattani as it is with Girish Karnad. Religious fundamentalism, communal tension, natural calamity like drought which makes people homeless, are some of Dattani’s favourite themes.

As a performing artist, Dattani believes in the magic of words. His plays are not meant to be read in the drawing room but to be staged for the audience. Hence, Dattani lays emphasis on stage directions. There are a lot of stage directions in course of play. These elaborate instructions sometimes make the reading of his plays clumsy. Political subjects, crimes of the society and the failure of law and order are some of the other themes of his plays. Social activists, detectives play a major role in some of his plays. If Girish Karand deals with myths and history, Mahesh Dattani highlights contemporary reality in his plays. It should be noted here that quite a few of his plays are commissioned by B.B.C. His radio and screenplays are very powerful in evoking the empathy of the viewers. Shabana Azmi makes an important
observation on Dattani's screenplay when she says, 'Mahesh's screenplay makes emotional transitions between the lines rather than through the dialogue' (Azmi, 333). She further explains the nature of a screenplay by referring to the observations of Frank Pearson in the following lines:

According to Frank Pearson, a screenplay means different things to different people. The producer 'weights' it for 'audience appeal', the director visualizes it as a 'progression of images and scenes', the designer tries to fit into locations and sets, the actor is intent to learn his lines and the assistant director sees it as a schedule (CP II 333)
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